

Norman G. Owen (ed.). *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History*. Singapore: Singapore University Press (also Honolulu: Hawaii). 2005. xxvi. 541pp. Maps. Tables. Photographs. Index. 0-8248-2841-0.

The book's predecessor, *In Search of Southeast Asia*, has a long history and will be remembered by students, undergraduates, and beginning graduate students alike, as their best friend in and out of the classroom during the seemingly endless pursuit of a general overview of Southeast Asian history. This reviewer is certain that the present volume will not only live up to that reputation, but go beyond. This is partly because it has been updated to more recent times, but mainly because the reading material has become much more digestible. One of the drawbacks of 'In Search of' -- a catchy title for the 1970s when many were mesmerized by the Leonard Nimoy hosted series similarly named (incidentally, after the appearance of the book) -- was that for those of us starting out, specialists of some countries wrote their sections of the book using the jargon of their particular field. This has been rectified. The language is straight forward and accessible to non-specialists, making it better suited for classroom use and for those who want a quick refresher on the history of the country without the necessity of a glossary. The book is also rich in production values. 'In Search of' suffered from the graphics limitations of its time; the present volume has received a very smart presentation: glossy pages, sharp maps, and clear photographs all make for an attractive book.

The volume is edited by Norman G. Owen and includes among its contributors well-known scholars of the field: David Chandler, William R. Roff David Joel Steinberg, Jean Gelman Taylor, Robert H. Taylor, Alexander Woodside, and David K. Wyatt (as well as contributions by Owen himself). The book includes thirty-seven chapters, divided into five parts, and covers the eighteenth century to the present. Some chapters are devoted to topical coverage, including "Southeast Asian Livelihoods," "Inner Life and Identity," "The Struggle for Political Authority," "Dynasties and Colonies, Boundaries and Frontiers," "Globalization and Economic Change," "Consolidation of Colonial Powers and Centralization of State Authority," "Living in a Time of Transition," "Perceptions of Race, Gender, and Class in the Colonial Era," "Channels of Change," "Depression and War," "Industrialization

and its Implications,” and “Human Consequences of the Economic ‘Miracle’.” Other chapters focus on the histories of specific countries, with three chapters each on Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia (and the Malay world), the Philippines, and two on Laos. Supplementary materials include the introduction and afterword, and notes on ‘Changing Names’ and ‘How to Use this Book.’ The divisions in the book are intended to meet the needs of different readers. The general chapters, for example, provide thematic overviews of Southeast Asian history for those who are interested primarily in the larger picture, while the remaining chapters are intended for those who wish to read about particular countries.

The volume is much less circumspect than other general texts on the history of the region. Going beyond the ‘traditional’ historical approach, the volume incorporates new developments and processes that usually have been dealt with by other disciplines in the past. The ‘Green Revolution’ and technology receive attention, for example, and so too, the chapter on race and gender provides insights from Anthropology. This reflects well the increasing move towards a multi-disciplinary approach to historical issues that has come to characterize the field. A survey of the literature included in the recommended readings indicates that the authors have kept up with current research, although the necessity of a brief listing obviously would leave out much specialist literature.

For the readers of the *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, the audience of the present review, Bob Taylor has written the sections on Burma. Taylor provides a clear, though necessarily succinct, overview of Burmese history from the late eighteenth century to the present. Although some specialists, including myself, have used Myanma/Myanmar to refer to the Burmans, Taylor does so to refer to the Burmese rather than to the Burmans, to whom he refers as Bama. Logically, this recognizes the Myanmar (also Myanma) identification not just as a present-day identity, but as a precolonial one. This is also an interesting angle because it also recognizes it as a precolonial *political* and not necessarily as an *ethnic* identity (p. xx-xxi, and throughout his three chapters), which is in keeping with suggestions made by Victor Lieberman concerning the use of the ‘Burman’ and ‘Peguan’ (Mon) identifications made in the 1740-1757 period. ‘Burma’ is used only

for its political relevance, that is during the colonial period and the 'Union of Burma' after independence. This is certainly a more sophisticated use of political/ethnic identifications than has been applied in most other general historical surveys of the country's history. Thankfully, some revision to other names is offered as well. Arakan, for example, is now spelled properly as Rakhine (although others have sometimes used Rakhaing), as 'Arakan' was a Portuguese invention (sixteenth century, Arracão, pronounced 'Arracan'). The only (small) drawback to his discussion is that Taylor, like others in the field, uses single nouns for rulers' names, rather than compounds. Among the most difficult obstacles facing beginning students is how to pronounce Burmese names and for those of us who have learned them already, it is difficult to appreciate the kind of challenge that 'Bagyidaw' presents to those who have not. Perhaps in later editions the volume could also include a phonetic chart for pronouncing some of the more difficult names (of places as well as of people), which would certainly give students more confidence in discussion sections.

This book is highly recommended as handy reference volume for libraries and as a course text for undergraduate and 'Masters' surveys. Specialists who would like a current overview of Southeast Asian history in general will also find this volume particularly useful.

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